

VZCZCXRO0148
PP RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHLC #0572/01 3411003
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 061003Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0774
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LIBREVILLE 000572

SIPDIS

LONDON AND PARIS ALSO FOR AFRICA WATCHERS
AF/C PLEASE ALSO PASS BANGUI AND BRAZZAVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/05/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [CT](#) [TO](#) [GB](#)
SUBJECT: GABON/CAR: GABON PUSHES HARD FOR CAR DIALOGUE

REF: A. LIBREVILLE 0571
[1](#)B. BANGUI 0226

Classified By: DCM Nathan Holt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) All major obstacles to the scheduled December 8 launch of an "inclusive political dialogue" in the Central African Republic appear to have been resolved, according to Gabonese mediators. Gabonese President Bongo will travel to Bangui for the December 8 opening of the dialogue, and Gabon is arranging to transport former CAR President Ange-Felix Patasse and former CAR Defense Minister Jean-Jacques Demafouth to Bangui as well. Both leaders face potential difficulty with the International Criminal Court, which has emerged as a major complicating factor in the peace process. Rebel leader Demafouth told friends in Libreville that he will not join a government led by Bozize and is reluctant to fly in the same plane as Patasse. Demafouth also claims that Bozize "imposed" former Burundian President Pierre Buyoya on Bongo as mediator in the talks. Gabonese officials privately express frustration with the whole cast of Central African players, and the cost of the exercise to date. They nevertheless remain optimistic and the dialogue can lead to a new political dispensation in CAR and an end that country's long-simmering civil conflict. End Summary.

All is Ready . . .

[1](#)2. (C) Gabonese Deputy Foreign Minister Nelson Messone told the DCM December 5 that Gabonese officials think all major obstacles to the upcoming inclusive political dialogue in CAR have been resolved, and that the dialogue should open on schedule December 8 with President Bongo and newly-designated mediator Pierre Buyoya (former president of Burundi) presiding.

[1](#)3. (C) Bongo has continued to press all sides of the CAR conflict to negotiate, according to Guy Rossatanga, a Gabonese official involved in the talks. Asked if Bongo has "pressured" Bozize to adopt a more conciliatory posture, Rossatanga said "it is more subtle than that." Nevertheless Bongo has told Bozize directly that if he cannot achieve a military victory--and he has shown that he cannot--the Central African president has no choice but to negotiate with his adversaries. Bozize made a one-day visit to Libreville December 2 (Ref. A). Rebel leader Demafouth and other CAR figures have also been in Libreville this week.

Ange-Felix Patasse

14. (C) The status of former CAR President Patasse appears to have figured heavily in the latest behind-the-scenes maneuvering in Libreville. Gabon plans to send a plane to Togo to pick up the former CAR president and transport him to Bangui for the talks, according to Gabon's deputy foreign minister. Presidential advisor Rossatanga confirmed that Gabon has been deeply involved in arrangements for Patasse's return, and scoffed at press reports that Gabon and France opposed Patasse's involvement. "Inclusive means inclusive," Rossatanga said, and Gabon wants all the major players at the table.

15. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Messone said Patasse nevertheless poses thorny problems for Gabon and others involved in the process. The ICC could issue an arrest warrant for Patasse at any time, Messone said, and both Gabon and CAR are members of the ICC and would be obliged to help execute the warrant. Messone urged the United States and others to pressure the ICC to allow the CAR political dialogue to proceed without hindrance. As a practical matter, Messone said, this means allowing Patasse to leave his exile in Togo (which is not an ICC member), participate in the Bangui dialogue, and then return to Togo. Presidential advisor Rossatanga told us separately that Patasse had asked to visit Libreville en route to Bangui. He said Gabon had not yet decided how to handle the request.

Demafoth's Hard Line

16. (C) Rebel leader Demafouth encountered one of our Embassy
LIBREVILLE 00000572 002 OF 003

FSNs at a social gathering December 4 and, when Demafouth was not fielding calls from the international media, he spoke candidly about Patasse and other issues. The meeting was unplanned; Demafouth is a relative and close friend of the family of our FSN's spouse. Demafouth said Bozize's strategy is to offer Patasse protection against the ICC in exchange for political support from Patasse's ethnic allies in CAR. Bozize will also give Patasse the status of a former president and various other perks, Demafouth predicted. Demafouth, who acknowledged that he has his own potential problems with the ICC, said he has warned Bongo that the international tribunal will "never" relent in its pursuit of Patasse.

17. (C) Demafouth said President Bongo had invited him to fly with Bongo to Bangui on December 8. Demafouth said he was willing to do so, but refused to share an airplane with Patasse. He speculated that the Gabonese would deliver Patasse directly to Bangui, then return to Libreville to pick up President Bongo and his entourage.

18. (C) In private comments, Demafouth remains scathing about CAR President Bozize, who served as head of the army under Demafouth--then the minister of defence--before coming to power in 2003. Bozize is "stupid", Demafouth said, and Demafouth would never join a government led by Bozize. Demafouth said he might allow some of his key allies to take jobs in a reconstituted government, but Demafouth himself would be unlikely even to remain in CAR following the dialogue.

Buyoya As Mediator

19. (C) Demafouth claimed that CAR President Bozize "imposed" former Burundian President Pierre Buyoya as mediator in the CAR peace process. Under the June 2008 Libreville peace agreement, Gabon's President Bongo was authorized to choose a mediator from four persons nominated by various sides. The communique issued at the end of Bozize's December 2 visit to Libreville states that Bozize "brought to the attention" of

Bongo the fact that Buyoya had been chosen. Gabonese officials downplayed the issue of whether Buyoya had been "imposed" by Bozize and said the former Burundian president is well known to the Gabonese and a good choice as mediator.

Libya's Role

¶10. (C) Gabonese presidential advisor Rossatanga told us that Libya continues to "create fires and then put them out" in CAR. Libya-backed rebel leader Abdoulaye Miskine has been causing problems but has little support on the ground, Rossatanga claimed. Libya has been disingenuous throughout the process, Rossatanga said. Libyan envoy Ali Treiki, who visited Libreville November 26, claimed that Libya was unaware of difficulties created by Miskine, Rossatanga said. Separately, CAR rebel leader Demafouth predicted that Miskine would remain in Libya and would not participate in the Bangui dialogue.

Mounting Costs and other Frustration

¶11. (C) Gabonese interlocutors also speak of increasing frustration over the cost of the CAR peace process at the attitude of some participants. Bongo has complained privately that CAR President Bozize treats Gabon like a "bank", according to Rossatanga. And various CAR officials, including government ministers, consistently arrive late and unprepared for scheduled meetings, Rossatanga complained.

¶12. (C) Nevertheless, Gabonese Deputy Foreign Minister Messone told us Gabon remains optimistic that the upcoming inclusive political dialogue can lead to real progress. There are few substantive issues separating the players, he pointed out, and the current deadlock does no one any good.

Comment

¶13. (C) It is of course difficult for us to judge CAR political dynamics from this distance. The Gabonese have worked very hard to bring the process to this point, however, and will be sorely disappointed if the upcoming dialogue fails to produce some kind of political deal and an end to

LIBREVILLE 00000572 003 OF 003

the ongoing low-grade civil conflict. CAR's long-suffering people will of course be far more discouraged. End Comment.
REDDICK